

Transcribing is an essential part of studying jazz. It is an invaluable tool that involves far more than the notes and rhythms. Truly 'learning' a solo helps one get 'inside' the style of the performer. To become one in their process of improvising, interpreting a tune, its corresponding harmonic progression and rhythm considerations. One internalizes the sound, articulation, phrasing, presentation and more. It also assists with the technical challenges every performer faces.

During a recent saxophone master class at the Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshop, a number of students inquired about transcribing – why, where to start and how to use transcribing. The faculty offered varied and insightful suggestions. As with anything in life, there are numerous ways to approach this and other challenges. One question that many had was where to start? How to select that appropriate solo? What would be a good solo for the more novice transcriber? What are the considerations?

I decided to seek the advice of my colleagues, the ones who participated in this very discussion and others I had met through the years – to ask their advice on where to start. I wanted to know their recommendations on the process and a good first solo for the novice and then one that would be good for someone more accomplished/experienced. This search could lead some to 'meeting' performers who they might not have been familiar with, or at least not studied in depth, which is valuable alone. Listening is always positive/productive, especially when one has a purpose in mind.

Following are general recommendations and then two lists. Some responders did not give specific solos to transcribe but various suggestions that could be adapted depending on the student and teacher. Next is a list of the artists and their solos for the more novice transcriber. The second for the more experienced. These are only suggestions but they are really excellent ones. It is enlightening to see the varied performers and styles. There are many classic recordings and some lesser known ones. In addition to selections for alto, tenor and baritone, there are recommended solos from non-saxophonists because of their significance as master improvisers: Louis Armstrong, Chet Baker, Clifford Brown, Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard and Winton Kelly. Do not feel like you have to restrict yourself to saxophone solos or even like type of saxophone. It is very valuable for an alto saxophonist to transcribe a tenor solo and visa-versa, for one to transcribe an instrument other than the one they play. As I mentioned earlier, there is so much to learn and experience. Finally, it's great that most, if not all, of these recordings can be found on YouTube or Spotify. Have fun finding them, you never know what else you will discover. It's also about the journey of learning.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS – in no specific order:

- Transcribe just a melody. Could be a standard, movie theme, bebop or pop tune.
- The first solo should be limited to no more than one chorus (32 bars) or two choruses of a blues.
- Consider starting with a blues master, like B.B. King, Albert King, Buddy Guy, etc. where the solos are blues based.
- Pick solos that would directly confront what are considered the weakest area in their playing – sound concept, time, articulation, or specific vocabulary.
- As a student continues to transcribe, they should seek to address various styles and specific challenges.
- The first transcription should not be too technical because it should be more about style and time feel.
- Try transcribing the same song recorded multiple times by the same artist and the same song recorded by different artists for comparison of style and approach.

- Transcribe something that is meaningful for the student, something that speaks to them, that they like and identify with, following their passion.
- You don't have to learn an entire solo but work on meaningful sections from a number of solos/soloists.
- More advanced transcribers, solos should be tied to things they are working on at that point: BeBop ideas, Blues ideas, modal playing, secondary dominants, substitutions, extended harmony, technical challenges, etc.

GENERAL ARTIST SUGGESTIONS – in no specific order:

- Miles Davis transcriptions of All of You and On Green Dolphin Street follow by Cannonball Adderley and John Coltrane solos from On Green Dolphin Street.
- Transcribe a trombonist – like JJ Johnson, Curtis Fuller, etc. – because their solos are often musical and rhythmic while using fewer notes than most saxophone solos.
- Any blues from The Charlie Parker Story
- Sonny Stitt for up tempos and up-tempo articulation.
- Cannonball Adderley and Phil Woods for expression and phrasing,
- Any Sonny Stitt solo from the albums: Tune-Up or Constellation.
- John Coltrane's Prestige period.
- Anything by Chet Baker – his trumpet and vocal solos/playing
- **Alto:** Anything by Jackie McLean, Sonny Stitt, Charlie Parker, Paul Desmond
- **Tenor:** Anything by Hank Mobley (the absolute best for harmonic clarity and line construction. Recordings like Soul Station, Roll Call, etc.), Dexter Gordon, Lester Young and Sonny Stitt
- **Baritone:** Anything by Pepper Adams, Gerry Mulligan, Ronnie Cuber
- 'Greater players' are often harder to transcribe because of the unpredictability of their style, which is their 'magic.' Don't avoid saxophonists like Joe Henderson, Joe Lovano.

Following is a link from FaceBook. Excellent choices, many included in the list.

[Nice Classic Saxophone Solo for Transcriptions Newbies](#) – Sam Sadigursky

THE PROCESS:

Selecting an artist and solo to transcribe is only the beginning, now you will need to get to actually transcribe. There are countless ways to approach transcribing. Each individual will have their own method that best fits their skills. Like most things in life, there is no one way but certainly some strategies that work better than others. Review the following for suggestions.

THE SOLO:

- Listen to the solo repeatedly, 'know' it to where you can sing along. Know the solo so well that it is internalized.
- Be able to play along with the solo. Become one with the soloist.
- Master educator/author/performer Jerry Coker suggested:

“transcribe a solo by simply hearing it a sufficient number of times, until it can be 'played' in your ear without actually listening to it again and again, double-checking it from time to time. In that manner you are actually transcribing from your memory, starting and stopping at will to reinforce the memory. In other words, you're not just transcribing by starting and stopping a machine endlessly. Instead you're logging the solo into your memory, then transcribing from your memory rather than the source, until you find it necessary to replay the recording to check the accuracy of your mental 'recording.' This of course means you can instantly 'turn on' replays in your memory without constantly rewinding, searching, and starting the machine.” Excellent advice.

- Many will listen and learn the solo in real time while others will slow it down to help with hearing the lines. I suggest learning the solo in real time first before considering slowing it down. You will likely discover that you ‘heard’ more of the solo in real time than you thought and that you only need to slow down a few places. There are numerous programs that can help with adjusting the speed, even YouTube has 75%, 50% and 25% options for slowing down. Only 75% is worth using. The overall sound quality is far too distorted to use the others.
- Notes and rhythms are only part of the valuable information you will gain. An artist’s sound, articulation, style, phrasing and more are vital elements that are part of the transcribing process.

WRITING OUT THE SOLO:

- Know the length of the progression? Is it 12 measures? 32 measures? Other?
- Know the form? If so, what is it? 8 measure phrases? A Blues? AABA? ABAC? Other?
- Lay out a ‘map’ of the progression/solo in 4 measure phrases. For example:
 - a blues – three, 4 measure sections.
 - 32 measures – eight, 4 measure sections
- Begin by filling in starting places, familiar phrases, scales, arpeggios, whatever is accessible for you, leaving space where you are not sure that will be completed later.
- Some will layout a sketch, not necessarily notes or rhythms but lines that show the ‘shape’ of the solo.
- If uncertain of the:
 - notes, sketch out the rhythm.
 - rhythm, place the notes within a period of time.
- Once your ‘map’ is filled in as much as possible, systematically review and fill in phrases or sections one at a time.
- Be realistic. Don’t try to do too much.
- Don’t get discouraged, be patient. You will improve the more you do.

At first, I wanted to give specific credit for solo selections, recommendations and general comments; however, I decided it would be too confusing since so many recommended the same solo and artists. General comments also had a great deal of similarity, consistent themes and practice. Once put on paper with credit, there were more recommender names than the actual information sought. I feared that the reason for compiling would be lost and somewhat confusing for those interested in the information. I decided to combine and adapt so that the general suggestions would be highlighted.

I’d like to thank the following for sharing their time and expertise. I know I learned a great deal from your recommendations and sure others will as well.

| | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Eric Alexander | Jim Carroll | David Kana | Dick Oatts | Tom Walsh |
| Tim Armacost | Jerry Coker | Gary Keller | Bill Overton | Bobby Watson |
| Don Braden | Mark Colby | Trent Kynaston | Anderson Pessoa | Walt Weiskopf |
| Geof Bradfield | Paul DeMarinis | Pat La Barbera | Noah Preminger | Jack Wilkins |
| Derek Brown | Denis DiBlasio | Adam Larson | Randy Salman | Shelley Yoelin |
| Hunt Butler | Bill Evans | David Liebman | Jim Snidero | Greg Yasinitsky |
| Gary Campbell | Greg Fishman | Charles McPherson | Gordon Towell | Tom Zininger |
| Jim Carroll | Javon Jackson | Tom Meyer | Mike Tracy | |

FIRST TRANSCRIPTIONS, page 1

ARTIST

Adderley, Cannonball (w Miles Davis)
(w Nancy Wilson)

Ammons, Gene

Armstrong, Louis
(w his All-Stars)

Baker, Chet (from You Can't Come Home Again)

Brasil, Victor Assis

Brecker, Michael

Coltrane, John

Davis, Miles

Desmond, Paul

Donaldson, Lou

Forrest, Jimmy

Getz, Stan (w Oscar Peterson)
(w Gerry Mulligan)

Gordon, Dexter

Gray, Wardell

Henderson, Joe

Hodges, Johnny

Kelly, Wynton

Konitz, Lee (w Marion McPartand, 1992)

Lateef, Yusef

Mobley, Hank

(w Miles Davis)

Moura, Paulo

SOLO

All Blues

Minority

Never Will I Marry

Stars Fell on Alabama

Things Are Getting Better

Blue Ammons

Canadian Sunset

Hitting the Jug

Stompin' at the Savoy

Big Butter and Egg Man

Satch Play Fats (Columbia Masterpiece)

Autumn Leaves

O Cantador

Midnight Voyage

Blues to You

Russian Lullaby

All Blues

All of You

Bye, Bye Blackbird

On Green Dolphin Street

So What

Take 5

Blues Walk

Black Forrest

I Want to be Happy

This Can't be Love

Apple Jump

Gingerbread Boy

McSplivens

Second Balcony Jump

Watermelon Man (original)

Twisted

Song for My Father

All of Me

Jeep's Blues

Freddie Freeloader

I'm Getting Sentimental Over You
(melodic paraphrase and solo)

All Alone

Dig Dis

Remember

Someday My Prince Will Come

Soul Station

The Best Things In Life Are Free

This I Dig of You

Samba de Orfeu

FIRST TRANSCRIPTIONS, page 2

Nelson, Oliver

Parker, Charlie

Rollins, Sonny

Stitt, Sonny

(w Bud Powell)

Stanley Turrentine

Webster, Ben (w "Sweets" Edison)

Woods, Phil

Young, Lester

(TV Broadcast w Billie Holiday)

(w Nat King Cole & Buddy Rich)

(w Count Basie, 1939)

(w Billie Holliday)

Six and Four

Stolen Moments

Billie's Bounce

Jumpin' the Blues

Now's the Time

Ornithology

Parker's Mood

Yardbird Suite

Just in Time

Sumphin'

Vierd Blues

Bread Basket Blues (Royal Roost)

Bud's Blues

By Accident

Cool Blues

I've Got Rhythm

Streamline Stanley

Strike Up the Band

Tune-Up

Back At the Chicken Shack

Sugar

Better Go (Ben & Sweets - Columbia)

Solar

Ad Lib Blues

Almost Like Being In Love

Clap Hands Here Comes Charlie

Fine and Mellow

I Cover the Waterfront

I Want to be Happy

Jive at Five

Just You, Just Me

Oh Lady Be Good

This Year's Kisses (melodic paraphrase)

Tickle Toes

NEXT-LEVEL TRANSCRIPTIONS, page 1

ARTIST

Adderley, Cannonball

Ammons, Gene
Brasil, Victor Assis
Brecker, Michael

Brown, Clifford
Coleman, Ornette
Coltrane, John

(w Miles Davis)

Farrell, Joe (w Airto)
Getz, Stan (w Getz/Gilberto)
(from Focus)
(from The Master 1975)

Gordon, Dexter

(from Go, 1962)

Griffin, Johnny
Herring, Vincent
Henderson, Joe (from Tetragon)

Hubbard, Freddie

I Was Doing Alright

Land, Harold
McLean, Jackie

SOLO

If This Isn't Love
(from at the Lighthouse, 1960)
Sack O' Woe
The Way You Look Tonight (Riverside)
Hittin' the Jug
Penedo
Confirmation
Midnight Voyage
Oops
Joy Spring
Law Years
Blue Trane
Fifth House (Atlantic)
I Want to Talk About You
Lazy Bird
Miles Mode
Moment's Notice
Mr. PC
My Shining Hour
On Green Dolphin Street
One Down, One Up
Robbin's Nest
Time After Time
Trane's Slo Blues
Tunji
Arroio (The Creek)
Doralice
I'm Late, I'm Late (Focus)
Invitation
It's Alright with Me
Move
Blue Bossa
Driftin'
Lady Bird
Second Balcony Jump
Rhythm-a-ning
Blues Up and Down
Invitation
Short Story
Straight Ahead
Byrdlike

Joy Spring
I Hear A Rhapsody

NEXT-LEVEL TRANSCRIPTIONS, page 2

Mobley, Hank

Parker, Charlie (w Lennie Tristano)

Rollins, Sonny

Rollins, Sonny & Coltrane, John

Stitt, Sonny (w Bud Powell)

(w Oscar Peterson Trio)

(w Bud Powell)

Turrentine, Stanley

Young, Lester

Dig Dis

Nica's Dream

Remember

All of Me

Bird of Paradise

Bird with Strings (especially Summertime,
If I Should Lose You)

Billie's Bounce

Confirmation

Don't Blame Me

I Get A Kick Out Of You 'take 7

Lover

Now's the Time

Swedish Schnapps

Moritat

Old Devil Moon

Pent-Up House

Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise

Sonnymoon for Two

St. Thomas

Tune-Up

The Way You Look Tonight
(from The Bridge, 1962)

Without a Song

Tenor Madness

All God's Chillin' Got Rhythm

Cherokee (any Stitt Cherokee)

Eternal Triangle

I Can't Give You Anything But Love

I Never Knew

I Remember April

Orange Ashtray

Sonny Side

PS I Love You (on bari)

Sugar

Lester Leaps In